

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1879

## THE SACRED BOOKS OF THE EAST

*The Sacred Books of the East.* Translated by various Oriental Scholars, and Edited by F. Max Müller. Vol. I. *The Upanishads*, Translated by F. Max Müller. Vol. II. *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas*, Translated by Georg Bühler. Vol. III. *The Sacred Books of China*, Translated by James Legge. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1879.)

THE series of volumes, of which the first three have just been issued simultaneously, under the able editorship of Prof. Max Müller, are a very significant sign of our age. Their object is none other than to give to the public the sacred books of the historical religions of the world, translated into English by the best living scholars, without praise or disparagement, and with no reference to theological controversies or the needs of missionary zeal. The translations aim at being exact and faithful representations of the originals, so far as this is possible, and they are published in the interests of science, not of religious dogma. It is intended that the scientific student of religion should possess in them trustworthy materials on which to found his generalisations and build his conclusions. The fact that such a work should appeal to a large public is not so remarkable as the further fact that it has been published at the expense of a university once supposed to be the stronghold of a narrow orthodoxy.

It is difficult to realise that the days are not long past when the very conception of a scientific treatment of religion would have been regarded either with horror or with indifference. The religious world would have none of it; the fashionable world associated science with bones and machinery. The task of translating or of reading the sacred books of other peoples was left to a few zealots bent on destroying the Christianity of modern Europe, or a small band of scholars whose labours were almost unknown beyond the privacy of the study. In many cases, indeed, translation in the true sense of the word was impossible; scientific philology had not yet explained the meaning of half-forgotten Eastern tongues, literary and historical criticism was still seeking its canons, and the wildest notions passed muster as to the antiquity of Oriental books. The mutilated and misunderstood fragments of Hindu or Chinese texts paraded before the reading public were travestied on behalf, now of a traditional orthodoxy, now of an irrational denial of the popular faith. The filthy and absurd rites of later Hinduism were made to subserve the cause of the apologist, while his antagonist retorted with moral excerpts to which a fabulous age was assigned or painted an ideal portrait of Confucius and his doctrines.

Thanks to the application of the scientific method to the study of language, of history, and of society, we can now examine the historical religions of mankind calmly and dispassionately, can estimate their relative influence and importance, can trace their origin and subsequent development. We have learned the great doctrine of historical evolution. The mind of man does not move by fits and starts any more than external nature; it is con-

ditioned by the circumstances surrounding it, and slowly grows to a ripe maturity. The various forms in which the religious emotions of man have clothed themselves, the various dogmas into which they have been crystallised, result from causes which can be discovered by careful research. The words in which they have been expressed lie like fossils in the strata of society revealing to the comparative philologist the ideas that prevailed at the time they were first coined or at the successive periods when their meaning was modified. Doctrine must necessarily develop because the mind of man develops, continually gaining new ideas and new points of view and recasting those of a past generation.

The history of doctrine may be read in the sacred books of a religion and the mode in which they have been interpreted. We see the words of the text gradually becoming fixed and sacred, and then taking upon them strange senses coloured by the beliefs and ideas of a later day. The simple utterances of an Aryan poet came to be regarded as the awful commands of the Almighty, and to constitute an infallible and irresponsible text-book of life and morals, of law and learning.

The relation of a religion, however, to its Bible may be twofold. It may have had an individual founder like the Buddha or Zoroaster, or Mohammed, and then the authority of the founder overrides that of the sacred book which derives its force and sanctity from him; or it may be the slow growth of time and circumstances, moulded, as in the case of Brahmanism, by a powerful priesthood, whose influence and dogmatic system rest entirely on the divine authority with which they have been able to invest their sacred scriptures. In the latter case a far stricter and more uncompromising theory of inspiration is necessary than in the former. To impugn a single jot or tittle of the canon is to overthrow the very foundations of the faith.

It will be a long while before the science of religion can do more than collect its facts and lay down a few broad and more or less provisional generalisations. Only when we know the way in which each of the historical religions of the world has been born and grown up, shall we be able to compare them with one another and with the unorganised religions of barbarous tribes. It has yet to be seen whether the different races of mankind have started with the same stock of religious ideas and followed similar courses of development, or whether, as has sometimes been asserted, each race has its own religion as peculiar and appropriate to itself as the colour of its skin or the character of its hair. If we may argue from the analogy of language the assertion is likely to turn out a false one.

The question of the origin of unrevealed religion cannot, of course, be answered by the study of sacred books. The early struggles of religion to clothe itself in articulate utterance lie too far behind the age of organised faith when a canon first becomes possible. An uncivilised people cannot have a Bible. It may be brought to them by others, but if so, civilisation is brought with it. To determine whether fetishism, or animism or any other "ism" was the primitive form of religion, we must look to other evidences than those presented by sacred books. Sacred books are the records of historical religions only. But it is with these records that the student of religion

must begin, rather than with the fragmentary and uncertain relics of older phases of faith.

In his introduction to the first volume, Prof. Max Müller offers some useful words of warning to those who approach the study of these old texts with exaggerated ideas of Eastern wisdom and profundity. "By the side of so much that is fresh, natural, simple, beautiful, and true," there is "much that is not only unmeaning, artificial, and silly, but even hideous and repellent." The extracts culled from them by popular writers, in order to illustrate the exalted character of ancient thought, too frequently stand by the side of other passages which painfully recall the infirmities of human nature. Mankind has worked its way but slowly to its present level of knowledge and enlightenment, and the mixed character of these ancient books may serve to remind us that we, too, have our infirmities and imperfections which will seem as strange to a future generation as those of Eastern sages do to us. Man is the creature of his age, and the best and wisest among us cannot escape from the influences that surround us, and the limitations imposed by the knowledge and prejudices of our own day.

These translations will be useful in dispelling another illusion which the enthusiastic pioneers into the realm of Oriental religion have occasioned. They are as faithful and accurate as the present state of philological science allows, and the reader will, therefore, miss the modern ideas that have too often been read into passages quoted from the sacred books of the East. By changing a word here, and inserting a word there, by assimilating the expressions of the original to the familiar language of our own Scriptures, a false impression of the character of these old books has not unfrequently been produced.

The Upanishads, with which the series of translations opens may be described as the text-books of sacred Hindu philosophy. They preceded the era of the Sūtras, or grammatical treatises on the Veda, the beginning of which may be roughly placed about 600 B.C., and form part of that of the Brāhmanas or Vedic commentaries. They embody the traditional doctrines of the Brahmins regarding the highest objects of human interest and inquiry, and in many cases may be shown to have been incorporated into a Brāhmaṇa. They aim at ascertaining the mystic sense of the Veda, and so lay the foundation of the later Hindu metaphysical systems. At the same time they are not exclusively Brahmanical; on the contrary, they seem composed rather in the interest of the Kshatriya Kings than of the priestly Brahmins. About 150 of them exist, partly in prose, partly in verse, out of which Prof. Max Müller has selected five of the most important to place before the English reader. It must be remembered that, like the Brāhmanas, the Upanishads form part of the inspired Hindu Canon.

The sacred laws of the Hindus, as taught in the schools of Apastamba and Gautama, occupy the second volume of the series. They belong to the Sūtra period of Indian literature, and we have not to read them long to discover the tyrannically Brahman spirit which they breathe. Dr. Bühler considers that the Gautama Dharmasāstra is in the main the oldest of existing works on sacred Hindu law. He further places Apastamba at latest in the fourth or fifth century B.C. A translation of the laws taught in

the schools of Vāsisht̥ha and Baudhāyana will follow in another volume.

The third volume contains Dr. Legge's translations of the texts of Confucianism, the Shū King, the Shih King, and the Hsiāo King. The Shū King is a collection of historical records, beginning with the reign of Yáo in the twenty-fourth century B.C., and coming down to that of Hsiang B.C. 961. The Shih King or Book of Poetry consists of 305 ancient poems, five of which belong to the time of the Shang dynasty (B.C. 1766-1123), and the rest to that of the dynasty of Cháu (B.C. 1123-586). Its philological and literary value is naturally very great. The short treatise known as the Hsiāo King, or classic of filial piety, is regarded by Dr. Legge as containing a Confucian element, but mostly composed in the first century before our era. Astronomical and other reasons on the other hand, dispose him to accept the antiquity claimed by the Shū and the Shih.

Prof. Max Müller may be congratulated on the successful commencement of his great undertaking. The publication of other sacred texts, including the Korân, the works of Lao-tse, and selected portions of the Buddhist and Zoroastrian Scriptures, are expected soon to follow. For obvious reasons, however, the sacred books of ancient Egypt and Babylonia, of which we now possess considerable fragments, have been excluded from the series. The Book of the Dead, the most important part of the Egyptian Canon, will be independently issued before long in a revised text and revised translation, while we must wait for future excavations to complete the mutilated hymns of early Chaldea, a portion only of which is at present in our hands. For many years yet we shall have to be content with collecting and preparing the materials that others will use, with sowing the seed which another generation will harvest. We have, indeed, come to realise that there is a science of religion, but it will necessarily be long before the science has passed out of its first classificatory stage.

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#### MODERN CHROMATICS

*Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry.* By Ogden N. Rood. International Science Series. (London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1879.)

IN Sir Charles Eastlake's preface to his translation of Goethe's "Theory of Colours," he took occasion to pronounce against the accepted theory of Newton (that white light consists of coloured lights compounded together), in the following sentences:—

"It must be admitted that the statements of Goethe contain more useful principles in all that relates to the harmony of colour than any that have been derived from the established doctrine. It is no derogation of the more important truths of the Newtonian theory to say that the views it contains seldom appear in a form calculated for direct application to the arts."

Since the time of Sir Charles Eastlake, however, great strides have been made in the theory of colour. The work of Prof. Rood now before us is the latest contribution to this branch of science; and in dealing with "Modern Chromatics," the author has brought to bear not merely a profound acquaintance with the work of all recent scientific writers on colour-theory, but also an intimate knowledge of the artistic and decorative functions